

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6451
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 0233

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, LE, SY, EG
SUBJECT: SAEB SALAAM SPEAKS OUT

1. SUMMARY: IN THE WAKE OF A NUMBER OF BOMBING INCIDENTS DIRECTED AGAINST THE HOMES OF ISLAMIC GROUP LEADERS, INCLUDING HIS OWN, SAEB SALAAM DECIDED TO SPEAK OUT AGAINST WHAT HE BELIEVES TO BE A CONSPIRACY TO SILENCE LEBANON'S MOSLEM POLITICAL LEADERS. IN AN EXTEMPORANEOUS STATEMENT TO THE PRESS JANUARY 11, HE TOOK A CAREFULLY NUANCED POSITION SUPPORTING PRESIDENT SADAT'S INITIATIVES, BUT ALSO MANAGING AT THE SAME TIME TO SUPPORT PRESIDENT ASSAD OF SYRIA. HE WAS CRITICAL OF WHAT HE SAID WAS EXCESSIVE AMERICAN DEFERENCE TO ISRAEL, IN SPITE OF REAL AMERICAN INTERESTS, AND BLAMED PRESIDENT CARTER FOR ALLOWING THE ROAD TO GENEVA TO BECOME BLOCKED. HE URGED LEBANESE GOVERNMENT TO "GET TOUGH," AND RESUME CAPITAL PUNISHMENT, IN ORDER TO REESTABLISH PUBLIC SECURITY. HE SPARENTLY, HOWEVER, HAD LITTLE TO SAY ABOUT NATIONAL RECONCILIATION, OTHER THAN TO CALL FOR REASONABLENESS AND TO CONDEMN INTRANSIGENCE ON BOTH SIDES OF TOWN. CHRISTIAN POLITICIANS AND MEDIA HAVE PREDICTABLY REACTED WARMLY. OUT OF OBVIOUS DEFERENCE TO THE CENSORS, THEIR PRAISE HAS FOCUSED

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ON SALAAM'S CRITICISM OF "COMMUNISTS" AND THE USE OF VIOLENT METHODS. MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD PRESS IN PARTICULAR PRAISED HIS CRITICISM OF THOSE WHO WOULD SILENCE MOSLEM LEADERS. LEFTIST AND PRO-SYRIAN PRESS PREDICTABLY STRONGLY CRITICIZED SALAAM, AS A STOOGUE OF SADAT AND AS ONE OF THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH LED TO CIVIL WAR IN LEBANON. SOME MODERATE MOSLEMS, INCLUDING HIS OWN

BROTHER MALEK SALAAM, ARE CRITICIZING HIS SUPPORT OF SADAT,
END SUMMARY.

2. FORMER PRIME MINISTER AND PROMINENT "ISLAMIC GROUP"
MEMBER SAEB SALAAM HAS PUBLICLY SAID LITTLE IN RECENT
MONTHS. THE ISLAMIC GROUP ITSELF HAS NOT MET FOR SEVERAL
WEEKS, AND HAS MADE ONLY SOME CAUTIOUS STATEMENTS,
PRINCIPALLY THROUGH ITS SPOKESMAN, CHAFIC WAZZAN, OPPOS-
ING PERMANENT SETTLEMENT OF PALESTINIANS IN LEBANON WHILE
AT THE SAME TIME AFFIRMING LEBANON'S DUTY OF "HOSPITALITY"
TO THE PALESTINIANS. AFTER SEVERAL BOMBINGS AND SIMILAR
INCIDENTS DIRECTED AGAINST WAZZAN, DEPUTY OSMAN DANA,
TAKKIEDIENE SOLH, HIS BROTHER MALEK SALAAM, AND, MOST
RECENTLY, HIMSELF, SAEB SALAAM CALLED IN THE PRESS JANUARY 11
AND MADE A WELL-THOUGHT-OUT BUT EXTREMPORANEIOUS STATEMENT.
(THE FOLLOWING HIGHLIGHTS ARE BASED ON EXTENSIVE EXTRACTS
PRINTED IN "IKE", AND L'ORIENT-LE JOUR JANUARY 12, WHICH
ARE NOT IDENTICAL. IT IS PROBABLE THAT THEY WOULD HAVE
PRINTED MORE, BUT WERE RESTRAINED BY THE CENSORS.)

3. THE EGYPTIAN-SYRIAN QUARREL. SALAAM PRAISED "HEROIC,
HISTORIC SADAT INITIATIVE" WHICH HE SAID "HAS HAD A
TREMENDOUS POSITIVE EFFECT ON PUBLIC OPINION ALL OVER THE
WORLD AND IN ISRAEL. FOR THE FIRST TIME, IT HAS PROJECTED
AN IMAGE OF THE ARABS AS CIVILIZED PEOPLE WHO, WHILE
INSISTING ON THEIR RIGHTS, CAN SPEAK THE LANGUAGE OF REASON...
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I AM AMONG THOSE WHO SUPPORT HIM, WITHIN LIMITS. THE
LIMITS ARE THE ARAB DEMANDS OF TOTAL ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM
ARAB TERRITORIES, INCLUDING JERUSALEM, AND THE RIGHT OF THE
PALESTINIANS TO SELF DETERMINATION. WHEN I SAY I SUPPORT
PRESIDENT SADAT, I BELIEVE I AM SPEAKING FOR 99 PERCENT
OF THE MOSLEMS IN MY COUNTRY . . . SOME TERRORISTS AND
THE COMMUNISTS WHO ARE BEHIND THEM WANT US TO BE ANTI-SADAT."
AT THE SAME TIME, SALAAM SAID HE SUPPORTED SYRIAN PRESIDENT
ASSAD "AND RATIONAL LEADERS LIKE HIM." HE SAID HE HAD
STUDIED ASSAD'S RECENT STATEMENTS AND "APPRECIATED THEM
FULLY." BOTH SADAT AND ASSAD, HE SAID, "AGREE ON STRATEGIC
GOALS, BUT DIFFER ON TACTICAL MATTERS. DIFFERENCES IN
TACTICS ARE INEVITABLE. IN FACT, I WISH SUCH DIFFERENCES
COULD BE PART OF A WELL-STUDIED ARAB PLAN."

4. CRITICISM OF THE U.S. SALAAM MADE HIS STANDARD
CRITICISM OF COMMUNISTS, BUT THEN ADDED, ACCORDING TO
"IKE," "I DO NOT MEAN TO GIVE THE IMPRESSION THAT THE
UNITED STATES IS OUT TO SERVE OUR INTERESTS. AMERICA,
USING WHAT IT BELIEVES TO BE AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC METHODS,
IS AFTER THE PRESERVATION OF AMERICAN INTERESTS. .. I SAY
THAT IT IS NOT IN AMERICA'S INTEREST TO MAKE ENEMIES OUT OF

THE ARABS. IF THE UNITED STATES DOES NOT MEET THE ARABS' MODERATE, REASONABLE DEMANDS, IT WILL MAKE ALL THE ARABS ITS ENEMIES AND IT WILL PUSH THE ARABS INTO THE LAP OF COMMUNISM, WHICH WOULD BE AGAINST ARAB AND AMERICAN INTERESTS ALIKE." HE SAID, "AMERICAN DEMOCRACY IS A VERY STRANGE THING INDEED. MR. CARTER WHO ONCE PUSHED FOR GENEVA AND PROMISED TO JUSTIFY THE HOPES WHICH ALL THE ARABS PINNED ON THAT CONFERENCE, BEGAN TO RETREAT GRADUALLY. HE HOPPED AROUND FROM JEWISH SYNAGOGUE TO ISRAELI MEETING; HE WORE THE JEWISH SKULL CAP; AND HE FINALLY ANNOUNCED THAT HE WOULD RATHER COMMIT POLITICAL SUICIDE THAN HURT ISRAEL. . . . THUS, THE ROAD TO GENEVA WAS BLOCKED, AND THAT WAS WHAT PROMPTED PRESIDENT SADAT TO LAUNCH HIS INITIATIVE."

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5. SALAAM APPARENTLY MADE NO DIRECT REFERENCES TO CURRENT RUMORS CONCERNING NATIONAL RECONCILIATION, OR ANY POSSIBLE RAPPROCHEMENT BETWEEN HIMSELF AND CAMILLE CHAMOUN. HE SAID THAT MOSLEMS ARE IGNORANT OF THE THOUGHTS AND FEARS OF CHRISTIANS, AND VICE-VERSA, "THAT IS WHY I HAVE CONSISTENTLY CALLED FOR COMPREHENSION AND AGREEMENT." HE SAID THE GREAT MAJORITY OF MOSLEMS AND CHRISTIANS WANT NATIONAL UNITY AND, "THAT IS WHY I DISAPPROVE OF ALL EXTREMIST POSITIONS AND AM TRYING MY BEST TO BREAK THE ICE AND LEAD US TO AMICABLE DISCUSSION OF OUR PROBLEMS." HE SAID HE WOULD HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH "COMMUNISTS AND THEIR ALLIES" (MEANING THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT, AND RACHID KARAME) WHO TRY TO INFLUENCE OPINION THROUGH VIOLENCE AND ANARCHY. ACCORDING TO L'ORIENT, HE SAID HE WOULD HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH "BROAD FRONTS" OR "OPEN FRONTS," "BECAUSE THEY ARE MERELY FORMS OF COMMUNIST TACTICS." HE SAID HE WOULD NEVER PERMIT "A FEW ANARCHISTS" TO DOMINATE LEBANON'S MOSLEMS.

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INFO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BEIRUT 0233

6. REACTIONS. CHRISTIAN POLITICIANS AND PRESS WARMLY WELCOMED SALAAM'S COMMENTS. PIERRE GEMAYEL SAID SALAAM WAS A COURAGEOUS MAN AND WAS PLEASED THAT "THERE IS STILL A PLACE IN THE ARAB WORLD WHERE A MAN CAN EXPRESS HIS OPINION FREELY AND WITH SINCERITY." CAMILLE CHAMOUN WAS INITIALLY RESERVED. ON JANUARY 12 HE SAID THAT SALAAM WAS COURAGEOUS, BUT SAID THAT HIS OWN VIEW WAS THAT JUDGMENT ON THE SADAT INITIATIVES SHOULD BE RESERVED UNTIL THEIR OUTCOME IS CLEAR. CHAMOUN ALSO SAID THAT SALAAM TENDED TO BLAME TERRORISM IN LEBANON ONLY ON THE COMMUNISTS, BUT "I THINK THE SCOPE OF THIS PROBLEM IS MUCH WIDER THAN THE COMMUNISTS." RIGHTIST NEWSPAPERS, INCLUDING LE REVEIL, AL BAYRAQ, AL AMAL (PHALANGE), AND AL AHRAR (NLP) ALL TOOK PARTICULAR NOTE OF SALAAM'S BLAMING "COMMUNISTS" FOR THE VIOLENCE IN BEIRUT. AL AMAL WAS PLEASED THAT SALAAM "SAID TERRORISM WILL NOT YIELD ANY RESULTS AND ACCUSED THE COMMUNISTS AND THOSE AROUND THEM OF BEING BEHIND THE BOMB ATTACKS AGAINST HIM AND OTHER MOSLEM LEADERS IN BEIRUT."

7. THE LEFT WAS PREDICTABLY ANGERED. COMMUNIST AN NIDA COMMENTED BITTERLY THAT, "OF COURSE SALAAM ATTACKED THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT, THUS UNVEILING HIS HATRED TOWARDS IT. . .
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HE ATTACKED, IN PARTICULAR, THE COMMUNISTS AT A TIME WHEN HE IS MAKING UTMOST EFFORTS TO RECONCILE WITH CAMILLE CHAMOUN. . . HIS ACCUSATIONS ARE COMPLIMENTARY TO ANWAR SADAT'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT."

8. PRO-SYRIAN VOICES, DESPITE SALAAM'S ATTEMPT TO BALANCE HIS PRAISE OF SADAT WITH PRAISE OF ASSAD, WERE COMPLETELY HOSTILE. PRO-SYRIAN BAATH PARTY LEADER ASSEM KANSO ISSUED A STATEMENT NOTING THAT SALAAM IMPLICATLY CRITICIZED SYRIA, AND SAID THAT LEBANON'S PROBLEMS ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE DEEDS OF FORMER LEADERS, OF WHOM SALAAM WAS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT. KANSO COUNTERED SALAAM'S CLAIM THAT 99 PERCENT OF LEBANON'S MOSLEMS SUPPORT SADAT WITH THE CLAIM THAT 99 PERCENT OF THE LEBANESE

WILL NOT AGREE WITH HIM. PRO-SYRIAN ASH SHARQ WROTE THAT SALAAM WAS ONLY THE FIRST OF SEVERAL "MERCHANTS WHO BARGAINED AND SOLD THEIR PEOPLE'S DESTINY OVER THE LAST THREE YEARS" TO SPEAK OUT. "WHAT WE WANT TO KNOW FROM SAEB SALAAM IS WHETHER WHAT WE DECLARED IS OUT OF SUDDEN CONVICTION OR WHETHER HE KNEW AND WAS SILENT ALL ALONG... HAS SOMEONE ELSE SUGGESTED TO SALAAM THAT HE SHOULD DECLARE HIS SUPPORT OF SADAT? UNTIL NOW SAEB SALAAM HAS SAID NOTHING ABOUT SADAT'S VISIT, POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE." ASH SHAEB ASKED EDITORIALY IF SALAAM THOUGHT THAT DISGUISED CRITICISM OF SYRIA WAS ARAB HEROISM.

9. CRITICISM FROM MODERATE MOSLEMS. SALAAM'S CLAIM THAT HE WAS SPEAKING FOR 99 PERCENT OF LEBANON'S MOSLEMS WAS SEVERELY SHAKEN WHEN HIS OWN BROTHER AND FELLOW ISLAMIC GROUP MEMBER FORMER MINISTER MALEK SALAAM, PUBLICLY DIS-AGREED WITH HIM JANUARY 12: MALEK SAID SAEB WAS NOT AUTHORIZED TO "SPEAK FOR 99 PERCENT OF LEBANON'S MOSLEMS." SPEAKING FOR HIMSELF, MALEK ATTACKED THE SADAT INITIATIVES, CONFIDENTIAL

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WHICH "REPRESENT RECOGNITION OF ISRAEL AND OF A UNIFIED JERUSALEM AS THE CAPITAL OF ISRAEL... WITHOUT GETTING ANYTHING IN RETURN." PRESS SYNDICATE PRESIDENT RIAD TAHA, A SHIITE FROM BAALBEK, ALSO TOOK EXCEPTION TO SALAAM'S PRAINSE OF SADAT.

10. COMMENT: DAMASCUS IS YET TO HE HEARD FROM. IF PRO-SYRIAN REACTIONS IN BEIRUT ARE ANY INDICATION, THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT MAY TAKE SALAAM'S STATEMENT AS A DECLARATION OF WAR, DESPITE HIS EFFORTS TO VERBALLY BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN SADAT AND ASSAD. SALAAM'S ATTACK ON "COMMUNISTS," BY WHICH HE MEANS MOST OF THE REMANENTS OF THE JUMBLATTI NATIONAL MOVEMENT, IS NOT NEW, BUT HIS STATEMENT PROBABLY MAKES IRREPARABLE FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE THE SPLIT WITHIN THE ISLAMIC GROUP BETWEEN THOSE, LIKE RACHID KARAME, WHO WANT TO MAKE COMMON CAUSE WITH THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT VIS-A-VIS THE CHRISTIANS, AND THOSE WHO WILL FOLLOW SALAAM IN MAKING PEACE WITH THE CHRISTIANS. LIKE ANWAR SADAT, SALAAM SEEMS TO BE GAMBLING HIS FUTURE ON THE REASONABLENESS OF HIS ADVERSARIES. THE VENTURE IS EVEN MORE RISKY IN LIGHT OF THE CRITICISM HE IS BEGINNING TO GET FROM SOME OF HIS CONSERVATIVE MOSLEM NATURAL ALLIES. BY MAKING SUCH A PUBLIC STATEMENT, SAEB SALAAM HAS INCREASED THE PRESSURE ON OTHER MOSLEM POLITICIANS TO TAKE A POSITIVE STAND ON THE ISSUES, AN ACTION THEY WOULD PREFER TO AVOID. PARKER

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